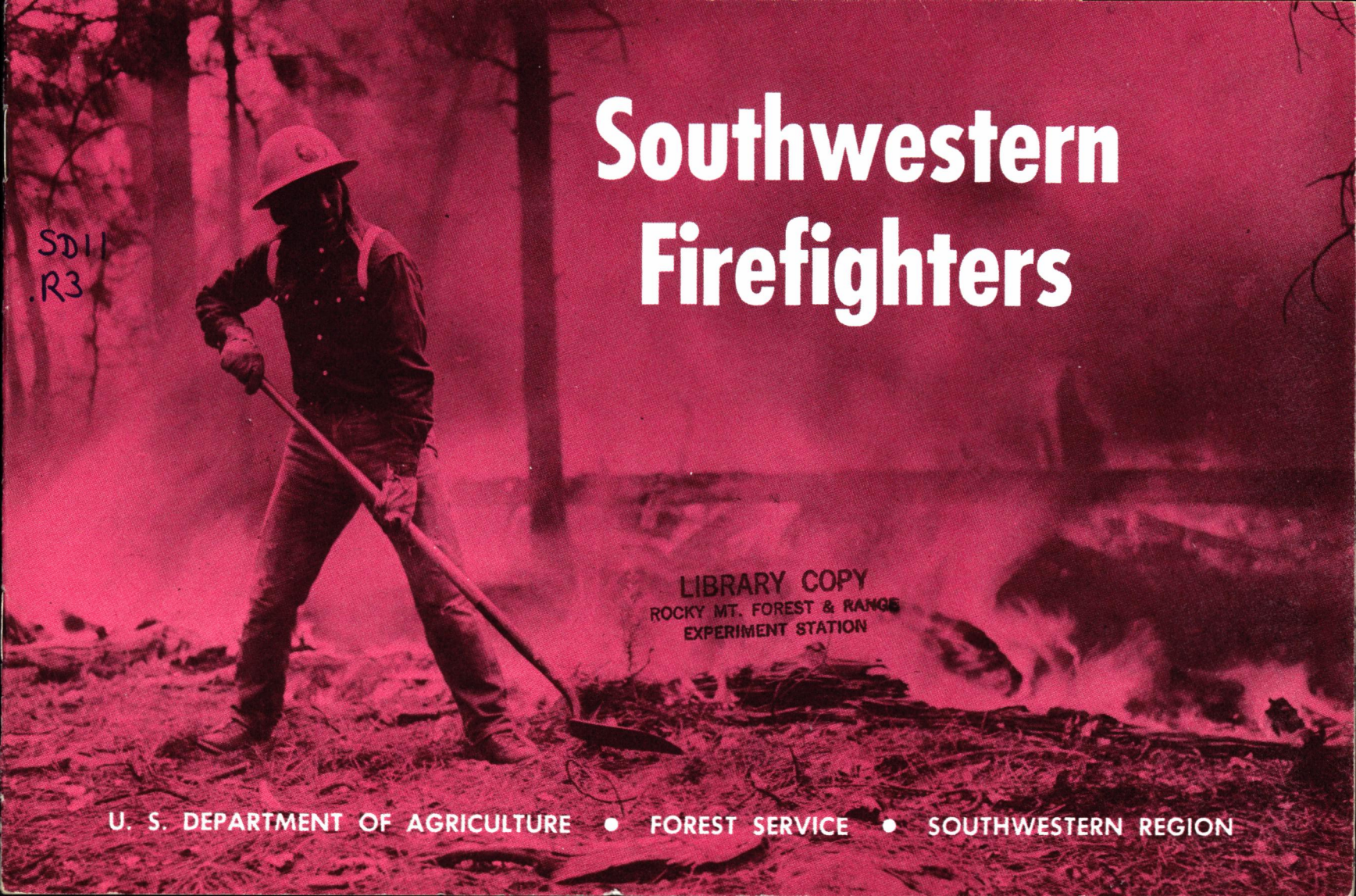

Southwestern Firefighters

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • FOREST SERVICE • SOUTHWESTERN REGION

GANDO

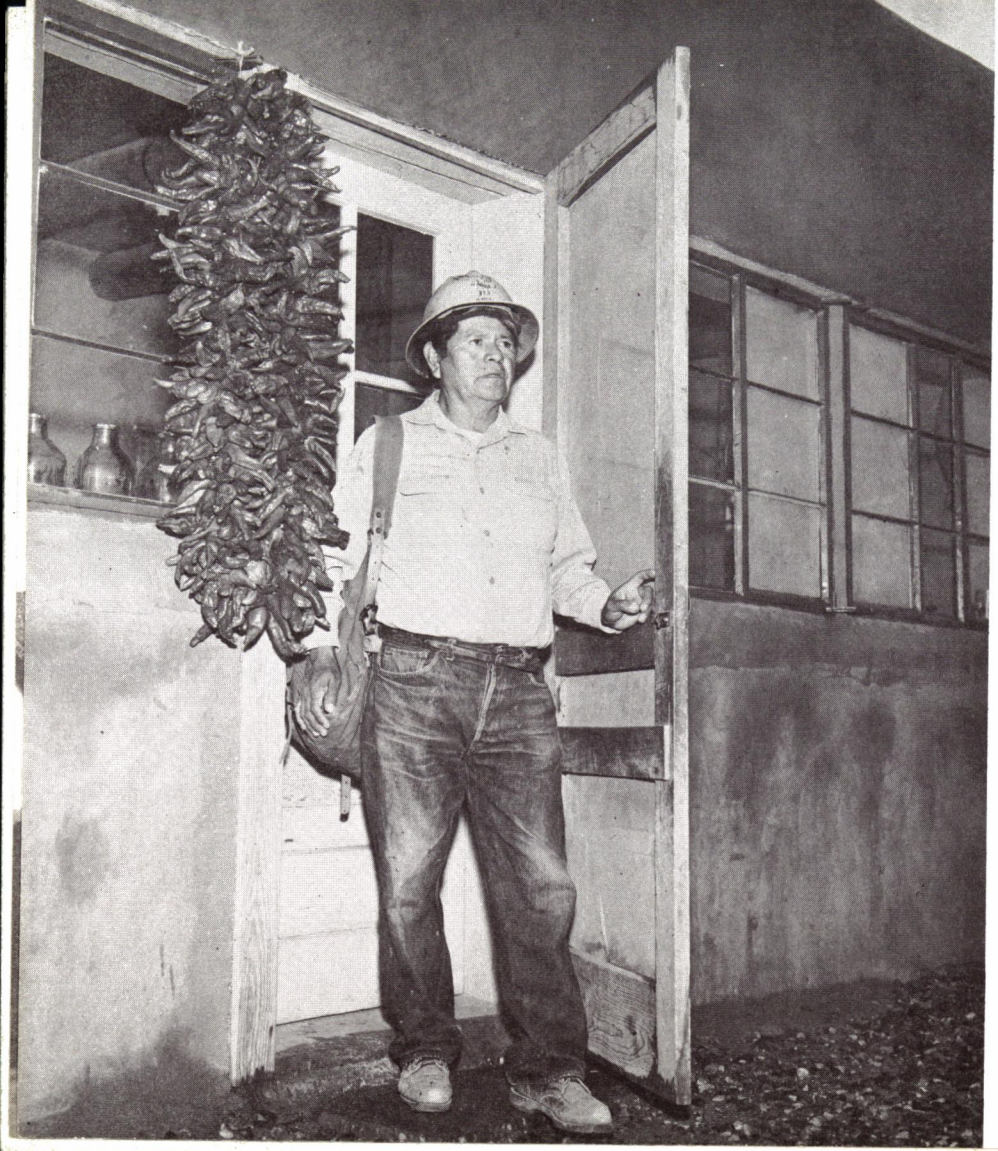
Southwestern Firefighters

Augustine Sando, Jemez Pueblo Indian, farmer, custom miller, and mechanic, pulled on a heavy pair of boots — boots that had tramped steep mountainsides on the National Forests in California, Wyoming, Arizona, and many other Western States. In another part of the small adobe house his wife filled a battered pack with extra clothes. Their 14-year-old son, Harold, listened to Sando explain some special duties the boy would have to perform during his father's absence.

The instructions were short. Harold was used to becoming the man of the house and running the family's small farm while his father was away. It happened several times each summer.

Sando now was ready to leave. With his pack slung on his shoulder and wearing his brightly painted hard hat, he pushed through the screen door and out onto the hard-packed dirt road leading to the central plaza of the pueblo. Mrs. Sando waved goodbye from the doorway. She didn't ask when she might expect her husband back. When the men of the ancient pueblo leave to fight a forest fire they may be gone two days or a month.

Forest Ranger shows foreman of organized crew where they are being sent on an Arizona fire.



Other men were emerging from their homes and walking toward the assembly area where a bus awaited them. The bus carried them to the Albuquerque Sunport where an Air Force and a commercial transport plane were waiting to take the Jemez Indian crew and two other crews along with the Forest Service liaison officers to Tucson, Arizona.

In less than two hours they landed in Tucson, ate a quick meal in the airport restaurant, and boarded a bus taking them to the rugged Santa Catalina Mountains in the Coronado National Forest. Their route led from paved highways to gravel roads and then two dirt tracks leading higher into the mountains. At this point the bus turned back and the men transferred to Forest Service and Army trucks for the last three miles into the fire camp.

JEMEZ

Crew unloads from plane at Tucson airport.

Bus carries crew into the Coronado National Forest.

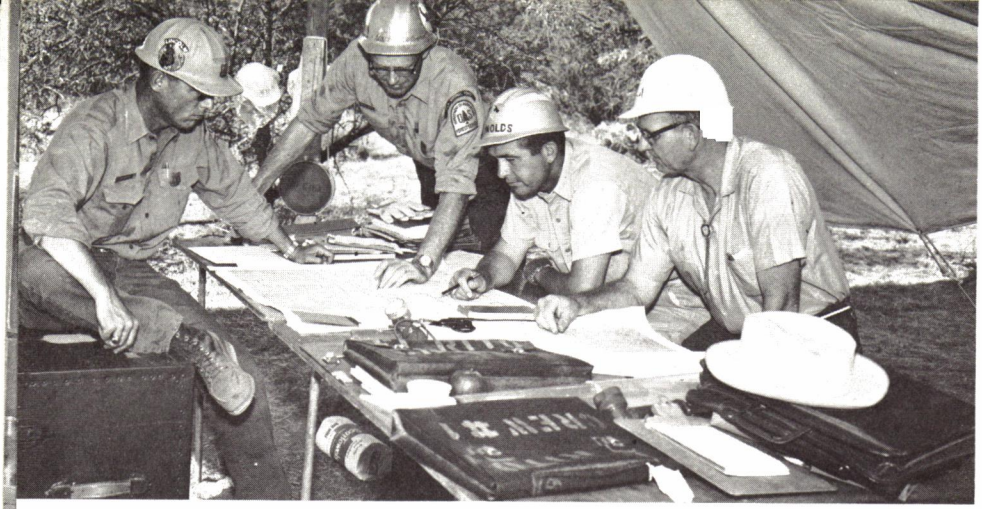
Army truck delivers crew to fire camp.

The Forest Service men accompanying the crews checked in with the fire boss, got the fireline assignments for these fresh crews on the next shift, and bedded the men down for a few hours' rest.

The buzz of conversation and the high-jinks of the younger crew members quickly died away as these experienced men took advantage of the brief respite before their hand tools were issued and they headed for the fireline.

Sando and Indians like him are professional firefighters. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and other Federal land administering agencies discovered years ago that an organized crew was far more efficient than the pickup labor that previously had been hired to fight big fires on public lands. Indians are particularly suited for this work because they're used to rugged country, manual labor, and working as a crew. Another advantage is their availability. Most are farmers or they are engaged in other agricultural pursuits that permit them to leave home for extended periods.

NAVAJO

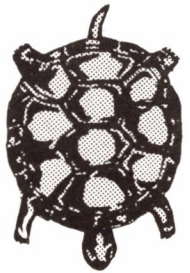


Fire boss and staff planning the attack on the fire.

Hand tools are issued to crew members.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs was the first agency to organize and train an Indian firefighting unit at Mescalero, N. M., in 1948. The next year the Lincoln National Forest in southern New Mexico called in a Mescalero Apache crew to help extinguish a fire, and Forest officials were pleased with the results.

From this beginning, the firefighter program has been developed by the Forest Service and cooperating agencies into a large, highly organized force which has played an important part in minimizing damage done by range and forest fires throughout the West. The labor pool now numbers some 1,450 men and in recent years ceased to be an exclusively Indian organization. In 1953 the first predominantly Spanish-American crews were recruited, mainly from the mountain villages of northern New Mexico. The first of these new groups came from Penasco.



TORTUGAS

QUESTA

CUBS

As in the case of the Indians, the Spanish-American villagers have the advantage of being available for this sporadic and unpredictable work. It would be impractical and prohibitively expensive for government agencies to maintain and pay a year-round firefighting organization. Under the organized crew system men are ready to travel at a moment's notice and are paid only while engaged in fire suppression.

Maintaining and training this ever-ready force is the cooperative responsibility of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the New Mexico Department of State Forestry.

The firefighters operate in 25-man crews with the number of crews available from the various reservations or villages depending on their populations. There are as few as 2 from tiny Zia Pueblo on the banks of the Rio Grande and as many as 9 from the much larger Hopi Reservation in Arizona and 14 from the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico.

An organized crew on the fireline.

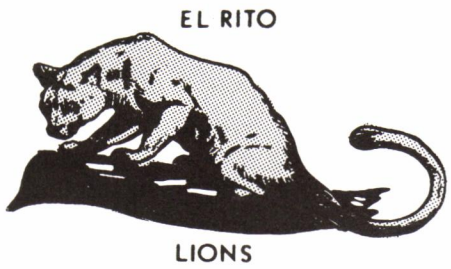
Fire boss keeps in contact with fireline by radio.

The organized crews, with their special training and better pay than the pickup labor hired in the vicinity of the forest fire, expect to be used in the roughest terrain or where the fire is most difficult to control. They take pride in their work because they know they are the elite of the ground crews. Also, each man's conduct reflects on the entire group.and a troublesome crew or one that does not produce as expected could be bypassed when the call for help comes on future fires.

Not being used on fires would be a serious economic blow to most of the crew members. Virtually every man depends for a large part of his cash income on the summer fire work. Their average income is low — especially in the northern villages where there is little industry and farming is a marginal affair.

PAPAGO

Ground crews are assisted by slurry drops from aerial tankers.



Being a member of an organized crew doesn't mean the men stay home all summer waiting for a call. Many take jobs in the larger cities which cannot be left when the fire alarm sounds. In other cases conditions at home could prevent a man from joining his crew.

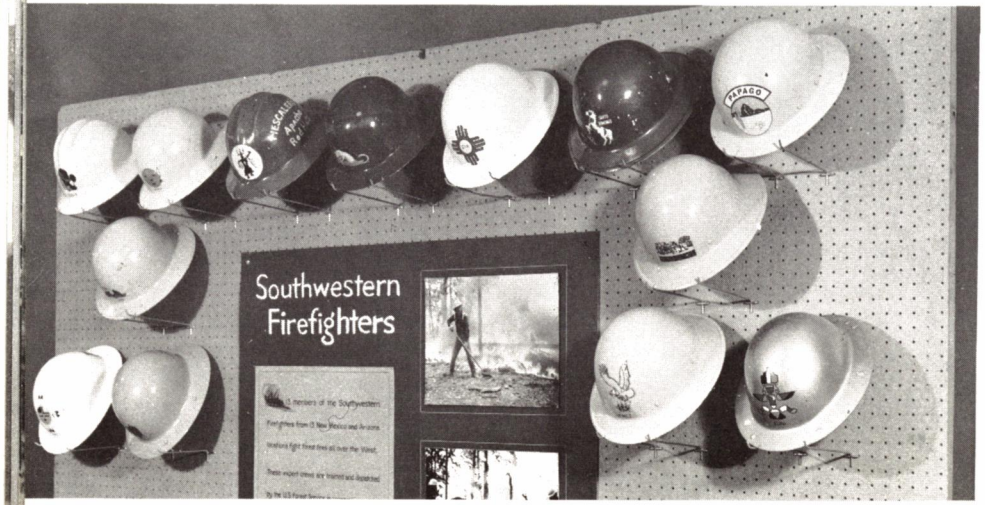
In effect, the number of men on the firefighting rosters is about double the number actually available at any one time. For example, the Jemez Pueblo has 110 tribal members on its fire force. Only about 50, or 2 full crews, are likely to be ready to go when the need for firefighters arises.

The Forest Service fire dispatcher at the headquarters of the Southwestern Region in Albuquerque, New Mexico, is responsible for securing organized crews when needed by his or any of the other cooperating agencies. The dispatcher arranges transportation to and from fires. This frequently involves chartering aircraft.

U.S. Weather Bureau meteorologist takes readings for fire weather forecast.

Building fireline is a hot, dirty, backbreaking job.

"Mopping up" the fire in every log and stump is hard work.



Hard hats issued to Southwestern firefighters for protection and identification.

Once reservation officials are advised that men are needed, it is their job to round up the firefighters as quickly as possible. The tribal leaders also must be sure the crew members have with them their identification cards and proper clothing. Each man must be in good health so as not to become a liability on the fireline.

Crew members must submit to annual physical examinations and be between the ages of 18 and 60 to be considered for employment. The strict health standards were instituted several years ago after one firefighter died while working in California and others became ill. No deaths attributable to poor health have occurred since the medical examinations have been required.

Crews from each community have adopted distinctive and colorful names like the Mescalero "Red Hats," and "Los Toros" from Mountainair. The hard hats worn for protection in fires are decorated with the crew names and symbols. An observer can find the hottest, most dangerous part of a forest fire by looking for the bright hard hats.

LOS TOROS

A group of proud Indian firefighters

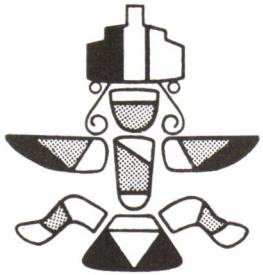
Organization meetings are held early in the spring at each Pueblo and town.

The identity cards issued to firefighters serve many purposes. They are work permits, proof of good health and experience, and a source of special information concerning the bearer. They can be taken away temporarily or permanently by representatives of the employing federal agency or tribal officials for rules violations.

Each 25-man crew dispatched by the Forest Service is accompanied by a liaison officer. Each agency has its own liaison personnel who are responsible for the crew's travel schedule, meals, pay records, and other personal needs.

Within the crew, the leadership begins with the crew leader and moves down through three straw bosses. Crews stay together on firelines except in rare emergency situations. They work strictly along established lines of authority, and this high degree of discipline permits the safe performance of their dangerous duties.

ZIA



ZUNI

Each spring representatives of the Forest Service and the other agencies travel to the various pueblos and villages to explain the fire crew operations to new members and arrange training sessions. The veteran firefighters sit in on these meetings, usually held in pueblo or tribal community halls, to help with the explanations and to learn of any changes in procedure or pay.

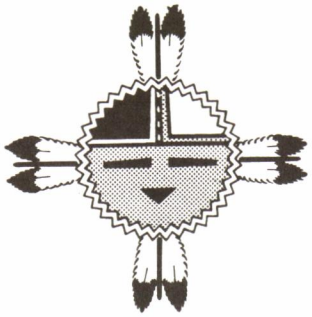
In the case of the Jemez Pueblo, crew and straw bosses are elected every four years. The crew leader represents his men in all dealings with the liaison officer and carries any complaints or problems from the crew to the proper authority for action. He also plays an important part in teaching firefighting techniques.

The roster of firefighters includes crews from the Hopi, Papago, and Navajo tribes in Arizona; Zuni, Jemez, Zia, Santo Domingo, and Taos from New Mexico; and Spanish-American teams from the New Mexico towns of El Rito, Questa, Penasco, and Mountainair.

Firefighters must be well fed.

The money earned during the fire season can represent more than 25 per cent of the annual income for most firefighters. This income varies from year to year, depending on the frequency and severity of fires. In the last ten years the total income for New Mexico and Arizona organized crews has varied from a low of less than $200,000 in 1957 to more than $1 million in 1961. The average annual wages for the 11 years beginning in 1954 was $566,802. To earn this the crews had enough time on the firelines to average 72 men fighting fire every day of the 11-year period.

Their work is vital to the Nation. Every forested acre saved from fire by the skill of the organized crews is an important piece of natural treasure. The treasure could be timber needed for building homes, beauty for the recreationist, forage for game animals and livestock, or watersheds vital for the production of quality water and the prevention of floods.



HOPI

A look at a sterile, denuded, gullied hillside left by fire is the most convincing argument supporting the need for maintaining the organized crews who deliver full value for their pay.

Despite the efficiency of these crews in controlling a "going" fire, the best way to protect these valuable resources of America's forest lands is to "Prevent Forest Fires." Smokey needs your help! Please cooperate by following Smokey's A-B-C's —

Always break matches in two!
Be sure fires are out — cold!
Crush all smokes dead!

A beautiful forest like this can be transformed by a moment's carelessness to the scene below.

Smokey says . . .

The Southwestern Firefighters are doing a wonderful job in protecting America's forest resources from destruction by fire. You, too, can do your part in helping me prevent man-caused fires by following these rules:

- ALWAYS HOLD MATCHES 'TIL COLD.
- CRUSH ALL SMOKES DEAD OUT.
- DON'T BURN ON DRY, WINDY DAYS.
- NEVER LEAVE A FIRE UNATTENDED.
- BE SURE TO DROWN ALL FIRES.

PLEASE! Only you can prevent forest fires